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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000194

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: FADHILA PARTY BOSS SOUNDS OFF ON MALIKI,
FEDERALISM, AND THE MARJA'IYYAH

REF: A. BAGHDAD 107 (NATIONAL PROJECT)
[1](#)B. BASRAH 002 (BASRAH REGION)

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Shia Fadhila Party legislative bloc leader Hassan al-Shammari told the Ambassador January 22 that the recently-passed De-Baathification Law and prospective passage of a draft Provincial Powers bill are "false victories" and should not be mistaken for signs of political progress. Displaying the maverick spirit that led his party to break away from the Shia United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) and run afoul of the Maliki government, Shammari criticized the Prime Minister for his non-inclusive style; claimed the GOI is unable to account for USD 1.5 billion earmarked for investment spending; decried sectarian-based politics and urged the USG to support secular liberals; asserted that the Najaf-based Marja'iyah no longer hold sway over the Shia masses; warned that Iraq is not ready for federalism; and predicted that formation of a Shia-based region or regions in south-central Iraq would only increase Iranian influence, which is already strong. End Summary.

Bleak Political Landscape

[1](#)2. (C) Fadhila Party CoR bloc leader Hassan al-Shammari and his deputy, Bassim al-Sharif, were decidedly downbeat in their assessment of Iraq's current political situation. While Fadhila sees "true political participation" of all parties in the GOI as the only way forward, Maliki continues to rule in a non-inclusive manner and Shammari has all but given up hope that Maliki will include a Fadhila member in a re-shuffled cabinet. On the contrary, Shammari asserted that Maliki seems intent on "punishing" Fadhila for withdrawing its 15-member CoR bloc from the UIA last year and he confided that he has heard from "international community" sources that he and Basrah Governor Waeli, a senior Fadhila Party member, may be in physical danger. He said Maliki and the GOI can take absolutely no credit for Iraq's improving security situation, which is attributable only to Coalition Forces, "Awakening" movements, and Moqtada al-Sadr's "freeze" on JAM operations. Shammari said he had not met with Maliki since the latter's return to Iraq after undergoing medical treatment in London.

[1](#)3. (C) The glib 45-year old lawyer characterized the ruling "Group of Four" alliance between ISCI, Dawa, and the two leading Kurdish parties as a "failure," and says he advised President Talabani and Vice President Hashemi to include other parties in their "Group of Three" alliance between the two leading Kurdish parties and the Sunni IIP. He was unenthusiastic about the fledgling "National Project" coalition (Ref A), alleging that it played to ethno-sectarian divisions and was supported by unnamed "external forces." He encouraged greater USG support for "liberal" political groups and parties because they enjoy greater public support than other parties, and cited as evidence the fact that Ayad

Allawi's Iraqiyyah Party won 25 CoR seats in 2005 even though the party was openly opposed by the Shia Marja'iyyah.

Sour Views on Key Legislation

¶4. (C) In a previous meeting on January 10, Shammari told Poloff that his party had taken a "strategic decision" to prevent Maliki from achieving any sort of political success until he shuffles his cabinet to include Fadhila cadres, adding that Fadhila will try to prevent a quorum for a vote on any significant bill (possible exception is 2008 budget) and will vote against any bill that comes to a vote, even though they were not successful in blocking the De-Baathification law. In his meeting with the Ambassador, Shammari said the party does not want to be an "obstacle" for Maliki but the PM must rule in a more democratic fashion. He stated that the recently-passed De-Baathification Law and prospective passage of a draft Provincial Powers bill are "false victories" and should not be mistaken for signs of political progress. Fadhila Deputy bloc leader Bassim chimed in that the De-Baathification Law created more problems than it solved because it bars key personnel from employment at several vital GOI Ministries. Regarding ongoing CoR deliberation over the 2008 GOI budget, Bassim noted with a wry grin that the Ministry of Finance has been unable to provide a clear accounting for USD 1.5 billion earmarked for 2007 investment spending.

¶5. (C) In reply to the Ambassador's urging of rapid CoR action on a Provincial Powers law, Shammari said he took a dim view of the current draft bill on the grounds that it does not set forth a specific date for provincial elections.

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In Fadhila's view, the absence of a fixed date will all but guarantee that such elections will not be held this year. Fadhila wants provincial elections to be held before the end of April: Shammari said his party favors an "open list" system but anticipates that the Najaf-based Marja'iyyah will oppose "open lists." He opined that the GOI is not serious about conducting elections. In a previous January 10 meeting, Shammari predicted that Fadhila, the Sadrist, and Shia independents will split the vote in the southern and central Shia-majority provinces, exposing ISCI and Dawa as parties without a popular base. Shammari and Bassim were noncommittal in response to the Ambassador's suggestion that the CoR forego a planned February recess and stay in session.

Federalism, Meddlesome Neighbors, Marja'iyyah

¶6. (C) After the Ambassador asked about Fadhila views on a proposal floated in the "Washington Post" by National Security Advisor Muwafaq al-Rubaie that called for five regions, two of which would be located in Shia-majority areas, Shammari said that federalism is a good concept but inappropriate for Iraq at the present time. He predicted that a Shia-dominated region or regions would only strengthen Iran's already significant influence in the south and center, lead to conflict between Iraq's Arab neighbors and Iran, and isolate such regions from the Arab and international communities. (We note that Shammari's stated view on region formation is at odds with fellow Fadhila cohort Waeli's declared intention to move forward on forming a Basrah region (Ref B)).

¶7. (C) Shammari agreed with the Ambassador's observation that Arab neighbors appear to erroneously believe that Iraq's Shia are somehow beholden to Iran and that Arab states should have a greater presence here in order to counter Iranian influence. In line with the Fadhila Party's belief that it -- and not the Sadrist Trend -- is the rightful heir to the teachings and orientation of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr

(Moqtada's late father), Shammari stated that the elder Sadr always emphasized the proud Arab identity of Iraq's Shia community and single-handedly ended a Persian tradition whereby Shia masses kiss the hand of senior religious clerics. In addition to the above-cited examples of Shammari's negative perception of the Najaf-based Marja'iyyah, he asserted that the international community should recognize that the "traditional" Marja'iyyah no longer hold sway over the Shia masses who do not revere them as saints, and should look instead to other senior Shia clerics of influence. (We note that while Shammari did not mention any such cleric by name, he may have been referring to Fadhila spiritual head Ayatollah Muhammad al-Yaqoubi).

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